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Refugees make Niagara home.  
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ALLAN BENNER/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Community Living day camp program participant Zoe Ludlow tosses a rescue line under the guidance of firefighter Wayne Benner Friday in Port Colborne. See more on page 5.

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# LOCAL NEWS

## No welfare concerns at Ringtail

**LAURA BARTON**  
Postmedia Network

As the news of Ringtail Ranch and Rescue closing down comes out, opinions are split.

On social media, some people said they think the Wainfleet animal rescue facility is better off being closed for the sake of the animals and people alike; others think Ringtail is being treated unfairly when it was just trying to do a good thing.

While letters from the Township of Wainfleet and Niagara Public Health have forced the facility to close access to the public, co-owners Joni Cook and Mark Drysdale said the matters contained within don't have anything to do with the animals' welfare — although that has come up as a topic of discussion, even from the owners themselves.

Cook and Drysdale defended their property by saying the animals there are in good health and are doing really well in that environment.

Maryann Prior, a zoo inspector with the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, who deals with Ringtail Ranch, agreed.

"There's been no welfare issues," she said. "We inspect them twice a year as per the government mandate. One is announced and one is unannounced."

She said the OSPCA has been working with Ringtail as it continues to make the ranch even better for its animals. The owners are currently up to par

with standards.

The non-profit is designated as a zoo because of the types of animals it has and because the animals are shown to the public for education purposes. Because of that, the OSPCA follows the government mandate that states zoos must be inspected.

Although Drysdale has expressed unhappiness about how the Welland SPCA takes care of its animals, the organization's executive director, John Greer, said Welland hasn't had any issues with the ranch.

"As far as we're concerned there's no animal welfare concerns that we would get involved with," he said.

The only way that the Welland SPCA has been involved with this case at all is by advising the township and Niagara Region's public health department on how to proceed given there are wild animals on the property, he said.

Michael Smith, chief administrative officer of Wainfleet, said ranch violations stem from the municipality's zoning laws and the types of animals on the property.

While there is no bylaw against exotic animals for Wainfleet, having the property used as an animal rescue facility that allows public to access it is where issues come into play.

The bylaw addresses domesticated animals specifically. Smith said Ringtail can appeal for an amendment, but it must meet a set of regulations first.

He also said that zoning



FRANKI NEMAN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Joni Drysdale, left, Julian the lemur and Mark Drysdale and Alex the Eurasian lynx from Ringtail Ranch and Rescue. Cook and Drysdale have defended their property by saying the animals there are in good health.

matter has been ongoing for at least a year — it's not all of a sudden as the ranch is claiming.

"We've actually been working with the owners of the property for over a year on this particular file," he said.

The township felt that nothing was being accomplished

and so it issued the letter, he said.

Drysdale acknowledged he and Cook have been working with Wainfleet about getting everything in order, but he disagrees with the township about his animals not qualifying as domesticated.

"The exact definition of a

domesticated animal is any animal that requires human care," he said.

Greer disagreed. He said no matter how much they are socialized, they'll always have that wild instinct in them.

Ringtail Ranch animals include lemur and lynx.

"At the end of the day, eve-

rybody has to remember that these are still wild animals," Greer said.

If Ringtail Ranch hopes to reopen, Smith said Drysdale and Cook will have to continue to go through the process to get a zoning bylaw amendment.

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## City funding to save NRE and NFF this year

**ALLAN BENNER**  
Postmedia Network

The city may have helped keep two Welland events running by approving a \$24,641 grant last week, in a last-ditch effort to save the Niagara Regional Exhibition.

City councillors voted last Wednesday to support a

funding request from Niagara Regional Agricultural Society, to allow the organization to run this year's NRE — despite an announcement in late July that this year's fair would be cancelled due to funding constraints.

And while saving the fair, the city may have also preserved a semblance of the

Niagara Food Fest that was cancelled this year as well, because plans for the NRE will also incorporate elements of a food festival into the activities.

Despite the good news for the 163-year-old fair, no one from the Niagara Regional Agricultural Society was at the meeting to celebrate council's

decision.

"Do you not think that maybe someone from the NRE should have been here tonight for a presentation?" asked Ward 4 Coun. Tony Dimarco pointing out their absence during the meeting.

"See no one showed up here, I think this is moving too quick ... I think someone should

have been here presenting it to us so we could get a clearer picture and get answers."

Asked if there would be a fair this year now that the funding has been approved, agricultural society board president Ray Ravazzolo said "right now I don't know."

See NRE on page 12



# LOCAL NEWS

## Refugee family happy to call Welland home

ALLAN BENNER  
Postmedia Network

Rana Bshara was overwhelmed by the green landscape below as the plane prepared for a landing at the Pearson International Airport last Monday.

"The first thing when you come to Canada is to see the green all around," she said.

And to the 31-year-old Syrian woman's eyes, Lake Ontario looked endless as it stretched to the horizon.

"I thought that it was a sea, not a lake," she said. "It's a beautiful country, and nice people."

It's a country Rana is proud to call home for herself, her husband Antoun, 41, their seven-year-old daughter Sollei and six-year-old son Ghassan.

Welcoming green space awaited the family at their Welland home, too.

"I love the tree," she said, referring to a huge catalpa tree in the large fenced backyard of the home rented and furnished for the family by parishioners from St. Kevin Church.

"We have to make a tree-house in it," she said, laughing.

Her children laughed in

excitement at the idea.

"I'm so happy here in the garden," she said, adding her children "spend all day here playing and chasing the squirrels."

It's a stark difference to the war-torn land they left behind.

But the family didn't want to leave.

They were living in a relatively peaceful community in Jaramana in southern Syria, and both Antoun and Rana had good jobs.

Rana worked in sales and marketing for Air France, while Antoun worked for a large printing company maintaining machinery at factories throughout the area.

"I was so happy in my work," Rana said.

Despite the civil war tearing her homeland apart, the family chose to remain as long as possible, hoping the conflict would eventually end.

Instead, it only grew worse.

She recalled artillery shells exploding in the communities surrounding Jaramana.

"Inside the city nothing happened, but you don't know when a rocket would fall down on the city, and who would be killed," she said.



ALLAN BENNER/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Rana and Antoun Bshara stand with St. Kevin Church priest Rev. Vijai Amirtharaj while their children Sollei and Ghassan climb a tree behind them. The Syrian family arrived in Welland with the help of parishioners from the Catholic church.

Meanwhile, the office where Rana worked was shut down due to the war in March 2012. She feared for Antoun's safety, because his job required him to travel to neighbouring communities.

"It was a danger, quite dangerous," she said. "You

don't know when some armed group will appear."

But their children were their main concern, and reason for ultimately packing their belongings and leaving.

"They are so smart kids, and happy kids and they

need to live in a peaceful atmosphere," she said.

The children, who will be attending classes at Alexander Kuska school in September, "were the reason to come here to Canada."

See Refugee on page 9

## Niagara's refugees total 100 and counting

ALLAN BENNER  
Postmedia Network

Niagara's population has grown by at least 100 people after about 25 families from Syria have arrived in the region during the past year.

And Welland Heritage Council and Multicultural Centre executive director Janet Madume said more refugees are expected, once they receive federal government approval to come to Canada.

Most of those families were brought here by private groups and churches, whose members were eager to pitch in to help people from the war-torn country start a new life in Canada.

Madume said the refugees she has met so far have impressed her. She called the Bshara family, who arrived in Welland this week with the help of parishioners from St. Kevin Church, "amazing, intelligent" people who "know what they want in life, already."

See GROWTH on page 9



### Niagara woman drowns in Lake Erie

The Niagara Press  
A Niagara woman is one of two people who drowned in separate incidents in Lake Erie

waters over the last few days. Ontario Provincial Police said last Thursday, just before 7 p.m., emergency crews were called to the lake's north shore in Saker, Ont., for reports of a woman in distress.

Police said Tracy Quinlin, 45, of Niagara went underwater while swimming with a friend

18 to 30 metres from shore and never resurfaced.

They said with the help of bystanders, Quinlin was found, brought to shore and given CPR.

She was taken to a local hospital, then airlifted to a Toronto hospital where she later died. Police did not name the Niagara community where

she lived.

Last Saturday at about 4:15 p.m., police, fire and ambulance crews were called to Long Point Provincial Park on Lake Erie after a young man disappeared while swimming with two friends.

The Coast Guard was called in to help look for the man with

a Hercules plane, but the search was suspended due to bad weather, police said.

The OPP said the body of Hussein Da Silva, 19, of Hamilton, was found in the water later that evening by two men walking along the beach. The coroner pronounced him dead at the scene.

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# We need to win the war of ideas

Before she took the podium or even spoke a word, Raheel Raza had already taken fire.

Even her friends were critical. What on Earth was she doing? Why would a Muslim woman address a room full of atheists?

Raza, president of the Council for Muslims Facing Tomorrow in Toronto, wasn't entirely sure how she would be received by the audience at the Non-Conference, at the Americana hotel in Niagara Falls last Saturday afternoon.

She is a proud believer. Most of her audience regarded the notion of a god to be absurd at best and a dangerous delusion at worst.

But Raza was not there to debate theology.

As a Muslim keen on reforming her faith so it can cast off, as she puts it, ideas best left in the seventh century, Raza came in search of allies to a ballroom filled with atheists.

The conference's keynote speaker was Masajid Nawaz, another Muslim reformer and former Islamist radical, who was there for the same reason. He too looked at the room of non-believers not as opponents, but as potential allies in a war to transform a religion deeply intertwined in acts of terrorism.

The debate, they say, is not between atheists and Muslims, but between Muslim reformers who want the religion to embrace liberal democratic values of free speech, freedom of religion and civil liberties, and extremists who rebel against modernity.

If non-believers stand for democracy, Raza and Nawaz said, then we can all stand together.

And I agree with them. We've just had another jihadist incident in Canada, to say nothing of the more severe incidents in Europe and the Middle East that have killed thousands of people. The need to combat extremist ideology is real, and it cannot be done by law enforcement



GRANT LAFLECHE/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Raheel Raza, president of the Council for Muslims Facing Tomorrow, at the Non-Conference in Niagara Falls.

alone.

It needs to be done in a civil society that actively and unservicely promotes a message that stands in opposition to the corrosive ideology of Islamists.

The problem is more complicated than we often think. Raza says she is deeply worried about the rising tide of fundamentalism found in the Muslim world, including here in Canada.

"There is a war going on in the house of Islam," she says.

Increasingly, she claims, mosques are funded by sources in Iran eager to spread a version of Shia Islam known as Khomeinism, or by sources

in Saudi Arabia promoting their take on Sunni Islam known as Wahhabism.

Both are fundamentalist versions of the religion. Mosques in Canada embracing either version may not be Islamist, and aren't calling for violent jihad.

In some respects, this is no different than Christian fundamentalist churches that hold very conservative, even regressive, social and political views. Those views may be distasteful, but they aren't a threat.

But Raza says there is still a problem.

The doctrine of groups like ISIS spreads like a virus online. And if a person absorbing this

doctrine attends one of these conservative mosques, they will have their radical beliefs about the world reinforced, even without an imam making a call to violence, she says.

This, she says, is why reform of Islam is so important.

In this tug of war between conservative factions of the faith, reformists like Raza and Nawaz stand with few allies. They are, as Nawaz puts it, "the minority within the minority."

And they need our support. Readers of this column know me as an atheist and anti-theist. I also like to think of myself as a realist. Billions of believers aren't going to abandon their faith overnight. Sometimes, we

need to focus on the politics of the possible.

Aiding Muslim reformists and facing Islamism as a global ideological problem may be the best way to stop another Aaron Driver, the man killed in Strathroy, Ont., by police last week, from becoming radicalized.

We have to win the contest of ideas.

If not us, then who?

As Nawaz points out, in some 20 Muslim-majority nations which are largely undemocratic, apostasy is criminalized and the "official" version of the faith is imposed by force. You cannot even have the reform conversation in that

context.

But we can have it in countries like Canada and communities like Niagara.

We can engage our brothers and sisters of the Muslim faith who reject the bigotry and misogyny of Islamist groups. We can support gay Muslims and women to seek to challenge religious orthodoxy.

It is hard to consider this, given the state of things, as anything other than a moral imperative.

To hear the full interviews with Raheel Raza and Masajid Nawaz listen to the Lake to Lake podcast at: <https://soundcloud.com/st-charlottes-standard>

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# Community Living children learn fire safety

ALLAN BENNER  
Postmedia Network

The ranks of Port Colborne fire department grew by a few dozen extra volunteers last week, although the new recruits were much younger than typical firefighters.

Children from Port Colborne Community Living's summer camp spent last Monday, Wednesday and Friday practising a few of the skills firefighters use to save lives.

"It has been phenomenal," Community Living's sum-

mer camp supervisor Berri Hoch said.

She said Port Colborne's fire prevention officer Scott Lawson living at the start of the summer offering to welcome the children to the Kilally Street West fire station to spend the day learning about fire safety while using some of the firefighting equipment.

"It was very hands-on and very informative, even for me. I learned quite a few things actually," she said.

The children who participated were eager to share

their new-found knowledge when they returned home at the end of the day.

For instance, Hoch said the children learned how to prevent electrical fires and kitchen fires.

Parents later told her that their children "went home and went around their houses making all the fire

plans and telling parents they had to have practices."

"It's been great. It's a lot of fun. This has been fantastic," she said.

In addition to learning about fire safety, the children had an opportunity to use a fire hose, climb through the fire department's training facility and

climb through fire trucks. Lawson said it was a one-week camp tailored to Community Living's programs.

He was pleased to learn that the children were passing on their knowledge to their parents.

"At the end of the day, that's the goal. We want them to have some fun, and

not to be afraid to come to us if they have an issue," he said.

Lawson said the fire department is considering holding day camps again next summer.

"It's just being part of the community," he said.

ABenner@postmedia.com



ALLAN BENNER/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Kohl Lubinsky takes a peak inside a fire truck with camp leader Liam McIntosh in Port Colborne.

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# Car linked to missing Welland woman investigation

ALLAN BENNER  
Postmedia Network

Niagara Regional Police have

determined that a car pulled from the Welland Recreational Canal in late July was associated with a 2013 missing person

investigation.

But police investigators have yet to confirm if the female body found within the vehicle

was Cathy Pietz, the 56-year-old Welland woman who was last seen at 10:30 p.m., Dec. 6, 2013. The submerged car was dis-

covered by recreational divers in the waterway near Canal Bank Street, and pulled from the water by a crane on July 29.

In an e-mail, last Tuesday, NRP media relations officer Phil Gavin said investigators have confirmed that the car "was the one associated to the 2013

Pietz missing person investigation, a red 2001 four-door Pontiac GT1."

However, he said, police continue to work with the coroner's office and the Centre of Forensic Sciences to determine the identity of the woman.

In an earlier interview, Gavin said DNA taken from the body is being compared to Pietz's DNA, but the testing could take from 30 to 60 days to complete.

Following Pietz's disappearance, police spent weeks searching the canal using sonar technology in the hope of finding the vehicle.

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## Biz crowd flying high over air service

MARYANNE FIRTH  
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Bookings have begun rolling in for upcoming flights connecting Niagara and Toronto — and it comes as no surprise to Mishka Balsom.

The president and chief executive officer of Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce believes the air service offered by Greater Toronto Airways announced last Tuesday will be a "great benefit" to the local business community.

Flights, which officially take off Thursday, Sept. 15, will depart Niagara District Airport in Niagara-on-the-Lake each weekday at 8:30 a.m. and land at Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport, also known as Toronto Island airport, less than 15 minutes later. Return flights will leave Toronto at 4:30 p.m.

The service — on a plane with six to eight seats — can also be used for day trips to Niagara, departing Toronto at 7:15 a.m. and returning at 6 p.m.

It will cost travellers \$85 (\$96 after tax) for a one-way flight and \$159 for round-trip (\$180 after tax).

"I think from a business perspective it is an affordable option to take advantage of," Balsom said, calling the cost comparable to commuter services in other communities.

During the chamber's business After 5 event last Tuesday, she heard from many people who echoed her thoughts.

"The positive feedback from a cross-section of different businesses that were there was really wonderful to see," Balsom said. "There was not a person there who

said it's too expensive, that it wasn't well-considered or that it wasn't something they would consider. It created a lot of positive conversation and I think that's a really good sign."

As the saying goes, "time is money," she said, and any option that saves valuable time, in addition to gas and parking costs, deserves a closer look.

It may not be ideal for daily travels to and from Toronto, but may ease the burden and stress of the commute if taken once a week or occasionally by people who visit the bustling metropolis for business, she said.

Balsom called air service an effective way for people to get in a full day of out-of-town meetings without having to face significant traffic woes on the highway there and back.

While conference calls have become the norm in today's world, "there's much to be said about face-to-face meetings" and the flights are another avenue to make that happen, she said.

"There's still a lot of value in being able to gather people around a table to move issues forward. I think it does open up that door."

Balsom believes the airline's investment in a Niagara commuter service is related to the booming housing market the region has been experiencing in recent months.

More people are beginning to consider the area a viable option to commute from and the addition of air service — as well as GO Transit's expansion to Niagara in 2021 — only further enhances that idea, she said.

See BIZ CROWD on page 16



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# LOCAL NEWS

## Niagara grows with refugees

**GROWTH from page 3**

"They have everything planned. You can tell," she said. "They only came to Welland a few days ago, but when I met them it felt like they had been here for months already."

While providing the families with any assistance that they require to settle into their new homes, Madame said immigration services agencies, such as the multicultural centre, also try to give the newcomers as much freedom as possible.

"We want them to be as independent as possible," she said.

Since arriving in Welland, several of the families have already made strides toward becoming active

members of the communities where they live, Madame said.

She said most of them are now taking English as a second language courses offered by immigration organizations.

"And know one guy who attended (English classes) for a couple of months, and then he landed himself a job," she said. "He's working already."

Most of the new families have also started volunteering in their communities — including the Bshara family.

"Volunteering is a way to say thank you," she said.

ABenner@postmedia.com



ALLAN BENNER/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Antoun Bshara, right, boosts his wife Rana into a huge tree in the backyard of their rented Welland home to be with their children Soheil and Ghassan. The Syrian family arrived in Welland, with the help of parishioners from St. Kevin Church.

## Comparing Niagara to war-torn land

**Refugee from page 3**

They left Syria last summer and spent a year staying with Antoun's relatives in Lebanon while awaiting permission to come to Canada.

St. Kevin Church priest Rev. Vijai Amirtharaj said the "parish community support was great from Day 1."

"They wanted to do something to help in whatever way possible," he said.

When he shared the plans with parishioners, Amirtharaj said they were willing to pitch in financially as well as "go to extremes to help."

"The people are very appreciative of what they have, and they want to share those blessings with those who are in need," Amirtharaj said.

The Bsharas are one of two families parishioners at St. Kevin Church planned to sponsor to bring to Canada. One of the families, however, opted to remain in Syria.

Amirtharaj said donations that were meant to accommodate the second family were instead given to refugee who arrived in neighbouring communities.

He said he parishioners were a bit disappointed that it took so long before the Bshara family was able to see their new home, but it was beyond the control of the local parish.

"But we're glad they're here, finally," he said.

Rana called it a "great to have this

opportunity to come here, and start a new life."

"I know it won't be easy, because we are newcomers. But the future is for us. It's for our children," she said.

In the meantime, she said she hopes that the conflict will eventually end in Syria.

"I hope that hope that one day, my beloved will have a more peaceful atmosphere," she said. "The Syrian people are good people, but the world is not fair."

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## City's contribution saves NRE

NRE from page 2

"There's no comment," he said.

Board director Bill Foote, however, said he met with agricultural society treasurer Art Gill and other board members "and we plan on having a somewhat subdued fair."

"I know there are more people in favour of having a fair than not," he said, referring to the majority of board members.

In a letter Gill sent to the city dated Aug. 3, he wrote that the announced cancellations of both the NRE and food festival have left the community "feeling a major void."

"The Niagara Regional Exhibition has never asked for a permissive grant from the city in its 163-year history," Gill wrote.

Although there is normally an admission fee at the NRE gate, the letter said this year's event would also be admission-free.

The organization plans to use the funding to hire a professional event manager to

organize the fair, which will be a day shorter than usual — running for three days from Sept. 16 to 18. In addition to continuing with many of the traditional elements of the fair, such as the midway, livestock exhibits, home show, demolition derby and the fastest baby contest, the event would also include food festival components such as vendors, an apple pie contest, huskers and the fire-fighters chili cookoff.

Ward 1 Coun. Mary Ann Grimaldi was one of several councillors who supported the funding request.

"If we can help them, I'm all for it," she said.

Grimaldi said people turned to social media websites to share their disappointment about the decision to cancel the fair.

"Some of them were blaming us (city council) for not having it, when we didn't even know there was an issue," Grimaldi said.

She said she wishes the agricultural society had "spoken up sooner."

"A lot of people like to take their kids to see the animals at the exhibition, and in order to have something going this year at the exhibition, I think it's a good idea," Grimaldi said.

Ward 3 Coun. John Mastroianni said the NRE is one of the oldest agricultural fairs in Ontario.

"To maintain that streak of 160-some-odd years, and then take a year off to regroup — I can't sit here and not give them some support," said Mastroianni, who served as a Niagara Regional Agricultural Society board member for about five years.

The \$24,641 being provided for the NRE had been previously included in the 2016 budget, earmarked for the Niagara Food Festival before the organization folded, but city treasurer Steve Zorbas said a request for an additional \$2,500 for waiving of fees will not be provided.

ABenner@postmedia.com

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# LOCAL NEWS

## Sexually abused children rescued

### ICEBERG from page 13

More than 60 electronic devices were seized for forensic examination, including computers, cellphones, memory

cards, gaming consoles, laptops, tablets, iPods, cameras, CDs and DVDs.

The investigation drew in more than a dozen units within the NRP as well as

assistance from Toronto Police Service's sex crimes-child exploitation section, which arrested one of the suspects.

In total, the woman was charged

along with four men from Niagara and one from Toronto.

Police said they are not releasing names of the six accused to protect the victims' identities.

The woman is the biological mother of two female victims, one aged four and one under the age of 18. She was charged with 36 criminal offences, 35 of which involve sex crimes, including sexual assault with a weapon, sexual interference and making and distributing child pornography.

ICEBERG continued on page 15

### The arrests

For a full list of 77 charges, please see [www.statharinessstandard.ca](http://www.statharinessstandard.ca)

**Female 1:** 30 years old from Niagara, arrested Jan. 22, 2016, remains in custody – 36 charges based on allegations she sexually assaulted both her children, supplied sexual explicit photos and made her four year old available to be sexually assaulted by others.

**Male 1:** 30 years old from Niagara, arrested Nov. 16, 2015, released with conditions after bail hearing – one charge of attempted murder

**Male 2:** 27 years old from Niagara, arrested Jan. 22, 2016, remains in custody – 11 charges including sexual assault with a weapon against a female under 16 and child porn offences

**Male 3:** 38 years old from Niagara and the victim of a stabbing, arrested Jan. 28, released with conditions after a bail hearing – nine charges of sexual assault offences against two female victims under the age of 16.

**Male 4:** 35 years old from Toronto, arrested Feb. 4, remains in custody – 12 charges including sexual assault offences against one female child under 16 and child porn offences involving two female children under 16

**Male 5:** 34 years old from Niagara, arrested Feb. 18, remains in custody – eight charges including sexual assault against one female under 16 and child porn offences.

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JOHN THYMOSZYN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Insp. Jim Prinsen is framed at a Niagara Regional Police news conference last Wednesday where it was announced several charges have been laid and six children have been saved from sexual abuse as a result of Project Iceberg, a police investigation that started with a case of attempted murder.



# LOCAL NEWS

## Sexually abused children rescued

ICEBERG from page 14

Some charges date back six years ago against her eldest child.

Police said the five men were known to the woman or actively sought out by her through social media.

Men aged 27, 34 and 38 from Niagara and a 35-year-old from Toronto all face multiple sex crimes against children, including sexual assault and sexual interference. The 38-year-old was the victim in the original stashing investigation.

The fifth man, aged 30 and charged with attempted murder in the stashing, was not charged with sex crimes.

McGuire said he was incredibly proud of the investigators who deal with things no one should have to deal with.

He urged the public to share information about suspected child abuse and not be a "stand-by."

"If these things are going on behind closed doors, very seldom I would suggest, it's not just one child and one adult," the chief said.

"There are other people who have information, that has knowledge, that have suspicion, and we need you to make those calls and bring that information forward to us so we can take some action to protect the children."

He said people shouldn't be afraid to call police with their suspicions or Crime Stoppers if they want to remain anonymous.

The NRP is a member of the Ontario

Provincial Police-led Provincial Strategy to Protect Children from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation on the Internet.

Since the inception of the provincial strategy in August 2006, officers have investigated 34,311 cases and laid 12,259 charges against 3,535 people.

They also rescued 1,128 child victims who were referred to support agencies.

The numbers include Project Iceberg.

"In my opinion and from my experience, this is one of the most difficult jobs in policing. I'm so proud of the work that they do and I admire these officers for their professionalism and integrity," said OPP Acting Insp. Frank Goldschmidt at the press conference.


Goldschmidt said it takes enormous resources and co-ordination to carry out these types of investigations because they have no boundaries.

While police are making progress combating Internet child luring, sexual exploitation and abuse, he said the work is not without its challenges in Canada. He said the proliferation, encryption and court decisions have impacted the work.

Police leaders have been working with various levels of government in hopes of developing new or stronger legislation to deal with online crime, specifically child luring and child sex abuse, he said.

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## LOCAL NEWS

## Aiming to reduce flight times

BIZ CROWD from page 8

The amount of time spent commuting is often a reflection of quality of life, she said, and the ability to spend time with family instead of on the road can make a world of difference.

"If (taking a flight) means you're back here at 4:45 (p.m.) and you don't have to miss your kid's soccer game, that matters to people."

Niagara District Airport commission chairman Gary Murphy is confident the service will soar to success.

But if it doesn't, it's not going to cost the commission a dime.

"We've got great expectations for them," he said, but "the airport doesn't lose anything, other than revenue fees, in the event the airline decides to terminate. That's business."

A deal between the airline and the airport was negotiated to include a terminal fee, sitting at \$5 per person per flight, a landing fee, which relates to the size and weight of the plane, and an airport improvement fee to help cover the cost of infrastructure enhancements.

If Greater Toronto Airports is successful in running one return flight per weekday, the airport is projected to make \$27,000, Murphy said, adding the facility's only impact will be minimal wear and tear.

If demand is added, revenue will increase accordingly.

"There's an escalator clause in there," he said of the contract between the two parties, which will be up

for renegotiation Jan. 1 after initial demand is reviewed.

The airline's online reservation system at [www.flyga.com](http://www.flyga.com) shows more than 30 seats on flights to and from Niagara have been booked since last Tuesday's launch.

Calls and e-mails to Greater Toronto Airports were not immediately returned.

"The more money we get coming in, the more it helps to take some of the burden off our funders, the three municipalities, to provide money," Murphy said. "This is why we're so in favour of a small airline starting out, seeing whether the market is there and watching them increase if the market is there."

Niagara District Airport is owned and funded by Niagara-on-the-Lake, St. Catharines and Niagara Falls. Each community's contribution is based on its population.

For the airport's 2016 budget, Niagara-on-the-Lake contributed \$23,884 toward operating costs and \$15,362 toward capital; St. Catharines provided \$203,793 toward operating and \$130,992 toward capital; and Niagara Falls contributed \$126,723 toward operating and \$82,739 in capital.

Potential governance changes for both Niagara airports have been under review since 2015 and are expected to be discussed at municipal and regional councils later this year.

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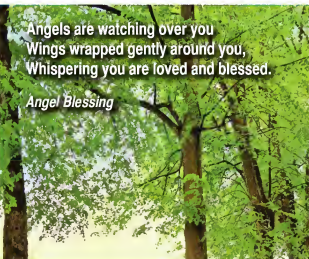
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